MASKS

IN THE YUNNAN NATIONALITIES MUSEUM

Pedro Ceinos-Arcones

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Dancing Dragons Books

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Cover picture: Mask of the Tibetan God of Water

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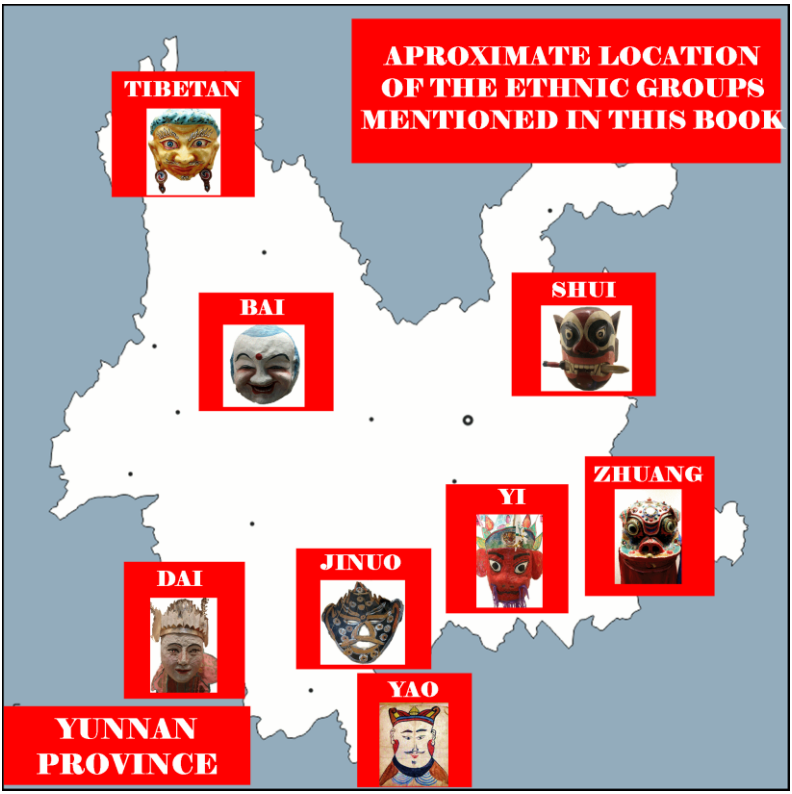
APROXIMATE LOCATION
OF THE ETHNIC GROUPS
MENTIONED IN THIS BOOK
TIBETAN
BAI
SHUI
ZHUANG
YI
JINUO
DAI
YAO
YUNNAN
PROVINCE

PREFACE

Masks are one of the most universal cultural objects, being present in peoples and nations of the five continents. As one of their most archaic artistic and religious manifestations, masks have accompanied human beings for millennia. Wherever one looks, in primitive or elevated cultures, tribal peoples or great empires, masks are a global cultural phenomenon created by human ingenuity for a series of religious activities.

Masks are one of the few objects that connect all humanity through time. Human beings have used ritual masks since the dawn of history to disguise, protect or entertain. They have been used by many different cultures around the world in festivals and rituals, ceremonies and feasts. Because masks, hiding the identity of the subject, allow him to become a new being, one that transcending the inherent limitations of his humanity, acquires those of the character represented in the mask, with whom he becomes confused.

An animal mask animalizes its wearer, that of a terrible deity makes him fearsome at the same time, and the one that represents a hero or mythical character, endows him with the qualities attributed to him.

Masks have always fascinated human beings because of their ability to transform reality and provide a form to entities that do not have one.

Their basic quality of hiding and transforming human faces, and putting a face on mysterious spiritual entities, has been used to transcend the human essence of religious practitioners and the divine of the spirits with whom they communicate, recreating a magical space in which people and spirits can interact on an equal footing.

The mask of a spirit indicates his presence in a specific place and time, turning this unfathomable entity into a concrete reality, with characteristics determined by tradition, and at the same time places him within the reach of human beings, who are then ready to request his favours or appease his evil actions. The priest with his mask transcends his own humanity, and without becoming a deity,

places himself on the realm where communication with gods and spiritual beings is possible.

The mask changes man in a superman. The world of masks recreates the primordial moment in which, before the fall of the first, humans and gods interacted freely. During the masked dance, one of its first uses of masks, historical time stops and the world goes back to the moment of the creation, from where the future can be modified at will.

The most primitive masks possibly arose as a result of the magical practices that sought to dominate the forces of nature for the benefit of man, using animal masks to succeed in hunting, skulls of ancestors and totemic animals to feel their protective presence, and others of terrifying appearance to mark the territory of the most fearsome deities.

The Yunnan Nationalities Museum (云南民族博物馆) has one of the best and most varied collections of masks in China. It is located on the outskirts of Kunming. At 1503, Dianchi Rd, right in front of the Minority Village. The bus A1 arrives at the door, and also go there the number 73, 44, and others. There is free entrance.

It is open every day from 9am to 5pm. The masks are displayed on the second floor, room number 5. It contains between 200 and 300 masks arranged thematically.

MASKS IN CHINA

Historical records and archaeological discoveries suggest that masks have been worn in China since ancient times. Allusions to the fact that during the coronation of King Shun the animals danced in a great feast, suggest that at that time totem masks were common, and that on certain occasions people wore the masks of their totems to identify with them. Especially interesting would be the use of animal masks during war, through which warriors hoped to acquire the courage, dexterity and agility of their totemic animals, and in hunting, trying to attract animals as their totem would.

The study of Chinese characters shows that the use of masks in religious ceremonies is also very old. Some of them suggest how such use was carried out, for example the character for demon (鬼) showed a masked person, suggesting that they were thus represented in numerous rituals. Particularly important in the religious context were the rituals of expulsion of evil spirits, later known as "nuo" ceremonies, in which a multitude of characters represented the spirits to be expelled with masks.

Animal masks and other costumes were used by shamans and exorcists for transformation rituals and dances which in ancient times were an essential part of ancestor worship, expulsion of evil spirits, fertility rites, propitiation of gods and all other festivities and ceremonies of the ritual year. Masks were also worn in battles (to impress and gather followers) and for hunting (as a disguise).

After the unification of China in 221 B.C.E., the most formal ceremonies for the expulsion of the spirits coexisted with other of lesser importance, which ended up becoming amusements for the court. The characters in these primitive dramas were usually the same venerated in the severe religious ceremonies, but the action

took place in a secular environment, deprived of the dramatic atmosphere inherent to all dealings with spirits.

As the theme and variety of these theatrical performances expanded, human characters began to appear in them, perhaps by Buddhist influence, towards the fourth or fifth century of our era.

While authentic theatrical performances, conceived exclusively for the amusement of the audience, developed from these primitive ceremonies, their essence was maintained in certain rural communities, where, stripped of the sumptuousness inherent to imperial ceremonies, provided the common people with a means of contact with the deities upon which their well-being depended.

In the theatrical performances, these originally masked characters progressively replaced their masks with a facial paint that also identified them with the character to be represented, an art that culminated in the so-called masks of the Beijing opera.

The religious current will be maintained in the nuo theatre, a theatre destined to exorcise evil spirits and attract the favour of gods and superior spirits, whose performance is still very common throughout southern China.

The history of masks in China, an almost unknown aspect of its culture, shows the close contact they have had with their religion and spiritual life and helps to understand that some of the most impressive artistic creations have arisen in this country, such as the giant bronze masks of Sanxingdui or the refined masks of the Beijing Opera.

MASKS IN YUNNAN NATIONALITIES MUSEUM

As Yunnan province is home to the largest number of national minorities in China, including minorities from many different backgrounds, it is not surprising that the Yunnan Nationalities Museum's collection of masks is one of the richest and most varied of China.

Given the characteristics of their ethnic and regional cultures, the masks found in Yunnan are known for their variety of materials, distinctive appearance, exquisite workmanship and wide range of uses. Among the minorities living in Yunnan province, masks are used for rituals, rites of life, festival celebrations, dances and operas, and other folkloric events, as well as a tool to repel evil spirits and protect against them.

There are masks made of various materials, such as wood, ceramics, paper, cloth, pumpkins, rice straw, palm fiber and bamboo shoot husks, which require different carving skills, color painting, paper gluing and weaving. Masks can be hung in front of the face, placed over the head. fixed over the forehead, or held in the hand. Others are hang in the lintel of the house.

Masks date back to the ancient history of man and are an integral part of the human arts. They continue to play a role in the lives of Yunnan's ethnic minorities, and are deeply rooted in their social life and ideology.

The collection of the Yunnan National Minorities Museum provides an overview of the variety and abundance of styles of masks made by the different ethnic groups of Yunnan.

Section 1.
Masks for ritual dances

Ritual dances are common among Yunnan minorities. They are performed with the aim of asking for good fortune and avoiding disastrous events. Regarded as symbols of gods, masks for ritual dances are worn by dancing priests on religious occasion to pray for fortune and against disasters. Used along with other religious articles, masks help the priests to communicate with gods and ghosts, to exorcise evil spirits, to cure diseases and to pray for longevity and abundant harvests.

The priest wearing a mask, by the mere fact of wearing it, is considered possessed by the spirit represented in the mask, whether an animal, an ancestor or a deity. In this way the soul of these powerful entities becomes present at the ceremony, guaranteeing with their presence that the requests of humans could be fulfilled. For the gods and ancestors are believed to inhabit the masks that represent them, since in Chinese culture an image does not represent the person or deity, is the person or deity.

Ritual dances with masks have a millenary history in China, some archaic characters point to their use more than 3,000 years ago, and animal figures appearing in the bronzes of the Shang dynasty (17th-12th century BC) would evoke, according to Elizabeth Childs-Johnson, the animal masks worn by the shamans during ritual dances held in those distant times. Images discovered in cave paintings suggest that the kings could direct these dances.

"Cham" masks of the Tibetan people

"Cham" is a Tibetan word meaning religious dances. They are representations of the sacred mysteries, which are staged to protect, guide and help meditate all those who are walking the Buddhist path, trying to shake the chains of material dependence. The dances seek to remember the inevitability of death, the fugacity of the soul and the cycle of rebirth.

The "Cham" masks are worn by groups of lamas who perform religious dances on the annual grand ceremonies in Tibetan Buddhist temples. These dances are aimed to drive out demons and evil spirits. These strange-looking colorful Cham masks, which can be roughly divided into the three categories of wrathful masks, peaceful masks and animal faces masks, are in fact physical manifestations of the deity (embodiment of the Buddha), the Dharma protectors and their followers. Each temple has its own set of masks and performs ceremonies different from those of other temples, performing on the dates of their choice their favorite sacred dramas (or fragments of them). After these seasonal performances the masks are kept stored until the following year.

The learning of the monks to take part in these dances is long and complex, the reward is attractive, as they end up reaching a meditation in movement, during which, with the help of music, dance and sacred symbols, they establish direct links (sometimes a possession) with the deities they represent.

Historical records assert that during the founding of the first Tibetan monastery, Samye in the 8th century, people danced with animal masks. This suggests that there was already a tradition of dancing with masks in Tibet, later used in Buddhist contexts.

JAMBHALA: TIBETAN GOD OF WEALTH

He wears a golden mask, as befits wealth, and is represented with smiling expression, earrings with the emblem of *taiji* (yin-yang), a stately moustache and the headdress with lotuses.

Jambhala is the Buddhist god of wealth, the equivalent of Kubera in Hinduism. For a long time he was considered a yaksha demon, pointing to his non-Hindu origin. Tibetans are practical and efficient people. They know that it is easier to exert compassion for others if one is free of worries about one's own financial existence. Therefore Jambhala, the god of wealth, plays an important role in the Buddhist and Hindu pantheons.

One can find him quite often depicted on thangka paintings or in metal statues. It is usually represented richly embellished, with the body yellow, the color of gold and a little overweight. Not very fat, but with a healthy appearance.

He is shown with a luxurious crown on his round head and a lemon in his right hand. In his left hand there is a mongoose that spits out jewels. This animal is supposed to be the receptacle of all the gems, Jambhala presses its two sides to force it to vomit the riches.

He can sit on a small dragon that looks adorable. Dragons are seen as benevolent beings in Asia. And it is normal that he keep in his hands some other attributes of wealth, such as a bag of money with coins.

PROTECTOR PALDEN LHAMO.

Palden Lhamo is one of the main protector deities of the Tibetan Buddhism. Among her many roles, she is the special protector of the city of Lhasa, the Gelugpa order of Tibetan Buddhism, and the Dalai Lamas of Tibet. She was invited to Tibet in around the eleventh century from India.

Legend has it that she was once married with an evil king in Sri Lanka. She asked her husband to stop killing human beings, and as he continued fighting and killing she vowed to kill her only son if he did not promise not to lead the people of Lanka to greater violence and cannibalism.

The flayed skin of her son used as the saddle blanket on her mule shows that he did not agree to her request. She rides across a sea of blood. Around her waist hangs a belt with severed heads. She holds a skull cup in her left hand. These images of violence are understood by initiates as sacred symbols of inner transformation in a compassionate religious culture that shuns every form of action, thought or word that might be harmful to other living beings.

In the mask her terrifying character is indicated by her mouth a little open showing aggressive teeth, her bulging eyes, wide eyebrows, the third eye that allows her to see beyond appearances and the diadem of skulls.

MASK OF THE GOD OF WATER

He is represented with a blue face, the colour of the water, earrings with the emblem of the *taiji*, a diadem and a stupa on his head. He is undoubtedly a local deity, as he shares the attributes of other gods of nature.

Tibet has abundant water resources, with the highest water quantity both in terms of the total amount and per capita. Besides, the region is also the birthplace for many rivers in China and Asia. For Tibetan people, water is a primary element of life. There is no life without water, besides, water has the power to create life or destroy everything.

The meaning of water is manifested in the Tibetan religion and is deeply rooted in its culture and beliefs. Water can wash away pollutants and dirties, it can make an object look as good as new and wipe away previous defilement. This same action is attributed to the great rivers and lakes present in Tibetan geography, which recreate pure environments wherever they pass.

The Tibetan people also believe that the water gods can control disasters such as floods. Therefore, they think that if they contracted a disease by drinking water, it was undoubtedly because they offended the water god. Since ancient times, water god worship activities have been popular in Tibet (Explore Tibet 2014).

MASK OF THE GOD OF DEER

Animals often appear in Tibetan opera scenes, sometimes at the opening. And sometimes the protagonists appear disguised as animals or their ideas, feelings and emotions are represented by the personification of an animal.

Animal masks represent various deities in their human or divine nature. In Tibetan operas there are dances in the style of different animals, such as the dance of the dog, the pig or the deer, and their brightly coloured masks exaggerate some of their fundamental qualities.

This mask of the God of Deer emphasizes the long horns of these animals, the sweetly open mouth, as well as a curious and friendly expression. Its skin is grey.

MASK OF THE GOD OF FIRE

In this mask, to facilitate recognition, the eyebrows, moustache and goatee are painted as tongues of fire. The deity wears earrings with the *taiji* emblem, a friendly look and blue hair.

Agni is the ancient Indian god of fire, and in Tibetan Buddhism he is also the guardian of the southeast. The worship of the sacred fire and its presiding deity, Agni, dates back to the origin of the first of the four Vedas, the Rig Veda (circa 1500 BC), which begins with the written name of the fire god, Agni.

Agni is considered the mouth of the gods and goddesses, and the medium that conveys offerings to them in the votive ritual. This god helps the worshipers to cleanse themselves of their sins, which he swallows and digests with his fire; gods are supposed to eat the sacrificial offerings through the help of fire which is called the mouth of gods.

In Tibet, he is found in the mandala of the medicine Buddha and in the Manjushri's mandalas as well. The Tibetan iconography for Agni strongly resembles that found in the Hindu tradition, with elements such as red colored skin, a goat vehicle, conical hair and crown, a beard, and wielding a pot of water or fire in one hand, and rosary beads in the other. Such art will often include Buddhist themes such as the dharma wheel, the white conch, the golden fish, the elephant, or the endless knot.

MASK OF A DHARMA PROTECTOR

A dharmapala is a type of wrathful god in Buddhism. The name means "Dharma protector or defender" in Sanskrit, and the dharmapalas are also known as the Defenders of the Law (Dharma), or the Protectors of the Law. Their cult dates back to the beginning of the 8th century.

They are typically divinities, usually depicted with wrathful iconography in the Mahayana and tantric traditions of Buddhism. Their wrathful aspect symbolizes their believed willingness to defend and guard Buddhist followers from dangers and enemies.

In Tibetan iconography and thangka depictions, dharmapalas are fearsome beings, often with many heads, many hands, or many feet. Dharmapalas often have blue, black or red skin, and a fierce expression with protruding fangs. Although they have a terrifying appearance and countenance, they are all bodhisattvas or Buddhas, meaning that they are embodiment of compassion that act in a wrathful way for the benefit of sentient beings.

The third eye suggest that he is a god and not an human being, as it is a symbol for far-reaching sight. The mouth shows fierce teeth. Bulging eyes and big eyebrows amplify this idea.

MASK OF A DHARMA PROTECTOR

This figure is a little different from other protectors displayed in the museum. His mouth is not open, but closed showing threatening fangs. He has the third eye, a diadem with three skulls and a conical hat.

In Tibet, most monasteries have a dedicated dharmapala which was originally comparable to a genius loci. The mask of these deities are venerated in monasteries, possibly after being used in ritual dances. Some of the oldest masks are found in the Sera Monastery in Lhasa.

The main functions of a dharmapala are to avert the inner and outer obstacles that prevent spiritual practitioners from attaining spiritual realizations, as well as to foster the necessary conditions for their practice

Though terrible in appearance, decorated with skulls and terrifying expression, they are a reflection of the Buddha's authority and the power of divinity. Their representation follows the instructions laid down many centuries ago in Buddhist canons: "The face is square for a male and round for a female. The three red eyes are round and wide-open. This figure knits its browns; its hair stands erect up to one span high. A statue of Buddha is placed on top of the headdress… Its mouth is open, its teeth stick out, but its tongue remains rolled up inside. Its crown is decorated with five skeletons" (Jiang Dong 1992: 7).

MASK OF THE GOD OF THE MOUNTAIN

With the blue face and friendly expression, it shares some characteristics with other masks of gods of nature, such as *taiji* earrings, friendly appearance, and eyebrows, mustache and goatee well profiled. It stands out his great conical hat of white color, that reminds the peak of a snowy mountain.

In the eyes of the Tibetans, which have a deep respect for all aspects of nature, mountains are the above of the gods while lakes are the place where the goddesses live. People usually regard a nearby mountain as a protector god (Xie).

There are countless high mountains in Tibet, and ancient Tibetans believed that gods resided on every one of them. The worship of mountain Gods was one of the most important forms of nature worship among ancient Tibetans; it was fundamental to their entire belief system. Each mountain God possessed his own territory and was in charge of particular affairs. Around each God sprang up myths, legends, sacrificial rites and procedures.

As ancient Tibetan society grew more complex, individual, autonomous Tibetan mountain Gods became associated in a complex hierarchy.

According to traditional, pre-Buddhist Tibetan belief, there are four great mountain Gods in the Tibetan region; each one is identified with a specific sacred mountain: yar-lha-sham-po in central Tibet; gnyan-chen- thang-lha, in Byang-thang in the north; sku-lha-rirgya in the south; vod-de- gung-rgyal in the south.

MASK OF A SIX-ARMED VAJRA

This mask shows a terrible looking deity with marked canine teeth, three eyes, and a diadem of five human skulls. It shows that although Vajrapani are a special category of protectors, they are protectors after all.

Vajra is the thunderbolt in Buddhist tradition. The Vajrapani are lightning bearers, irate deities with a deep symbolism. Their most striking role is effectively as protectors, sometimes at the gates of temples, one on each side.

Usually the two vajrapanis have a symmetrical position, one with the left hand raised, and the one in front of him with the right one. One usually has the mouth open and the other the mouth closed, thus creating a complementary movement.

Their fierce appearance shows that they were not originally Buddhist deities. At esoteric level is considered that their mouths reflect the first breath from which everything was created, as one would symbolize the aspiration and the other the exhalation. In the oldest images the position of their arms was not threatening, but was raised in a ritual dance: the dance of the creation in ancient Hindu traditions.

GOD OF CEMETERY - SITAVANA.

This is a mask of terrible and strange aspect, the third eye is vertical and not horizontal. Its mouth widely open gives it a certain lightness, which also corresponds to the fan-shaped ears.

According to Tibetan legends he was a ferocious ghost often leading demons to cause disasters. In the 8th century Padmasambhava used boiling water to turn Sitavana into an skeleton. Since then he became a guardian of the celestial burial platform.

The skull-shape mask is decorated with five smaller skulls on top of the head, and his two ears take the shape of unfolded fans like a pair of wings (Gong 2008: 59).

Section 2

Mask for the life rites.

In China, before the 1940s, it was universal to summon the gods and perform rites to purge bad luck and invite good luck. Such rites were performed on a variety of public and private occasions such as annual events, agriculture-related events, religious holidays, ceremonial functions and illness.

Masks for life rites are used on the main rites that mark the main stages of the passage of life, such as adulthood ceremony, wedding ceremony and funerals. Of these masks, the funeral masks are more commonly used. As tools for communication, entertainment for gods and exorcism of evil ghost, masks for life rites embody people' s worship for life and pursuance of happiness.

Shamans (spiritual mediums) used animal masks and other costumes for the transformational rituals and dances that were an essential part of religious life in ancient China. These masks have often expressive, realistic, non-stylized features. Related to these ritual masks are the masks worn by the young of the Yao minority during the *dujie* rite of passage ceremony.

Of the masks used in the ceremonies that mark the cycle of life, the most common are funeral ones. China has a long tradition of funerary masks, the first possibly being the simple bowls of red painted ceramics that covered the heads of some people in Neolithic tombs.

One possible evolution would have been to open two eyes to these primitive masks, as Marcel Granet considers that these types of masks were the ancestors of the spirit tablets, in which the spirits of the ancestors were worshiped.

Among the Kitan and other steppe peoples who once dominated the northern half of China, it was customary to bury people with a mask made by imitating their facial characteristics, made of gold, silver and other materials, in order to keep the soul of the deceased close.

In Yunnan, a wide range of funeral masks are used, with different shapes and meanings, some of which will seen below.

"Dujie" (Initiation Rite) Masks of the Yao people

Popular among the Yao people in Wenshan and Honghe Prefectures, the Dujie masks are used for the ceremonies of the boys' rites of passage. The ceremony, performed for boys that are about fourteen years old, will be held on a carefully chosen auspicious day. The initiates take part in rituals, observe the taboos and learn religious rituals and knowledge. At the ceremony, a rectangular flat mask with Taoist deities is worn to change the normal identity so as to gain recognition and communicate with ancestors and deities.

Dujie ceremony includes both group and individual rites such as soul calling, merit-making rituals and initiation rites. The events take several days and are held to honor the village's and mountain's guardian spirits.

For the Yao, men are considered adults only after they have participated in and passed the adult ceremony, then they are allowed to start romantic relations with girls and get married. For many Yao, the Dujie is sacred and holy, even more important than marriage. A man who has not taken part in or passed the adult ceremony is not considered as a real man, and probably can never find a wife. [China-travel.com]

There are two types of masks on display. Some, made of paper, represent the gods, which the boys must wear on their faces during the initiation, and others, made of wood, are those of the deities King Pan and Jiulang, and their masks guarantee their presence during the initiation.

The process of the adult ceremony takes a lot of preparation time. As soon as a boy is ten years old, his parents invite a knowledgeable man to calculate the best year for him to take part in the adult ceremony. One or two years before the ceremony, the parents step up the preparations and set an exact date. After that, many knowledgeable teachers are invited to help in the instruction. The teachers use books and impart their own knowledge about all the traditional Yao moralities, virtues, and rules. The boy practices diligently on a big table as a dress rehearsal for the ceremony and sleeps in bed covered with a quilt for five days before the ceremony begins.

The Dujie ceremony itself is long and complicated. It begins before the sun rises. The teacher first reads scriptures and helps the boy go through the religious rites. Then a teacher who wears a red gown helps the boy put on the same clothes, tying the red belt, and putting on a charm of an ancient Yao sacred statue. The teacher ties one end of a red ribbon to his own waist, and the other end to the boy's waist, symbolizing that his student is just like a baby who has not yet been delivered from the mother's womb. With the divine sword and the ritual apparatus in his hands, the teacher leads the boy into the courtyard for the ceremony. On the way there, the teacher also hands out paper money to the surrounding audience.

After reaching the altar of heaven, the boy first walk around the altar three times in a clockwise direction under the leadership of the teacher. Then the teacher climbs up to the altar with a tool shaped like tree leaves in his hands, murmuring some words. Then he comes down, leads the boy to the big table, and unties the red belt symbolizing birth. At the same time, he tells the boy about the oath he will make. The boy kneels down to thank his teacher before the wooden ladder is taken away. Then the boy swears to heaven, that he will never commit the crimes of murder, arson, robbery, theft, rape, kidnapping or mistreat his parents, and things like that. When the oath is finished, the teacher makes a red stamp on one of the boy's hands with a triangle seal.

Dujie, or literally, converting by fast, stands for the Taoist rite of initiation to the Yao. By analyzing the Taoist ideas embedded in the rite and the Taoist source of the commandments connected with the rite, it is seen that it represents the inheritance and evolvement of the Taoism among the Yao people. Originating from the rite of talisman conferring in the Way of Orthodox Unity, which was an early sect of Taoism, the rite of dujie reflects many Taoist elements and the convert of the native religion of the Yaos to Taoism.

The far-reaching rite also shows the spread of Taoism in the Yao society and the combination of Taoism and the native culture among the Yao people. As a rite representing the Taoist thought, dujie plays a religious part with profound anthropological significance and historic value in the Yao society.

Jiulang, the Ninth Boy, is Fu Jian's ninth son. Throughout southern China, and especially in the Jianghuai area, there are many temples dedicated to this personage, for although he is a minor deity in the general panorama of Taoism, he is especially revered among the Yao, who summon him in numerous ceremonies.

Panhu, which is also called Panwang (King Pan) and Pangu, is the name of a legendary dragon like dog. Panhu is actually a totem to the Yao people. Many Yao people believe that Panhu is their first ancestor. They worship him and offer sacrifice to him, especially during his annual festival - the King Pan Festival.

Even after his death, the King Pan still blesses and protects his offspring. Legend has it that one year the Yao villages were stricken by severe droughts. As a result, all the villagers had to leave their native land to flee from the calamity. Things went from bad to worse when they were hit by a storm on their boat. At this moment they could do nothing but to prey to their first ancestor for protection, hoping that he would bring them safely in shore. It turned out that their wish was realized and they arrived safely in shore on October 16th in the lunar calendar, which happened to be King Pan's birth-day.

Yao people celebrated their survival and made a vow to King Pan by offering sacrifice to him. This became a convention and it is still kept today.

"Longyawai" Funeral Ceremony Masks of the Zhuang people

These are funeral ceremony masks popular in the Zhuang communities of Wenshan.

The masks are shaped as a lion, they are in fact a cow head called "Longyawai", a gift given by the living to the dead, symbolizing that is a real cow for feeding them in the afterlife. The purpose is to let the dead live a carefree life in underworld with no concern of the human world.

These masks are made of paper pasted on a bamboo frame and are used together with two grim face masks.

Three people wear the three masks to dance on the day commemorating the dead and the following day for the funeral procession.

The museum exhibits three large masks, one with a lion's head, one cow's head and one with a shepherd's head. They are very elaborate and of complex design, with huge mouths, eyes like round mirrors, and sometimes with fabrics hanging to cover the wearer. There are two smaller and simpler ones, one with the face of a monkey, used by the companions in the procession.

Amosongtie Funeral masks of the Jinuo people

These are mask used on funerals of the "Seven Elders" in charge of the village affairs of Jino people' s villages. After the death of an elder (an old person that belong to the "Seven Elders" group), a ritual dance called Amosongtie must be performed.

Accompanied by a *mang* (a percussion instrument) and ballads, the three lead dancers would wear bamboo shell masks and horse bells, dress as women and dance (with backup dancers who will replace them when needed) for four or five days until the body is placed in a coffin. They would join the bereaved family, carrying the coffin on the way to the cemetery, taking their costumes and props with them.

After the body is interred, they would make up and put on their masks again at the cemetery; and returning to the village they will still dance to send away the soul and exorcise the evil.

They are simple masks that adapt to the contour of the face, reinforced in the openings of the eyes, nose and mouth.

Lion and Tiger mask (funeral ceremony) of the Yi People

These are funeral masks of the Sani branch of the Yi people, which inhabit in Shilin County. After a male elder in the village passes away, the lion- and -tiger dance would be performed on both the mourning day and on the day of carrying the coffin to the cemetery. Each of the mourning teams is led by a person who wears a lion or a tiger mask. After paying respect to the deceased, the team leaders begin to perform a lion- and -tiger mask dance.

Accompanied by local band, the scene is a magnificent one. On the next day of the funeral ceremony, led by the lion-and-tiger mask dancers, people carry the coffin to the cemetery and bury the body. After the burial, the masks are burned.

The masks, much larger than human heads, are reminiscent of those used in China for the dragon and lion dance. The lion's head has a drawing of the *taiji* on its forehead, the tiger's drawing the *wang* - king character, which indicates it as the king of animals. Both extend under their own mask with fabrics that will hide the wearers, that of the tiger with a pattern that reminds their fur in nature.

Section 3.

Masks for festival sacrifice

Most of the festival celebrations of the present were originated as religious ceremonies and sacrifices performed to mark the cycle of yearly productive activities. Ceremonies that usually included the offering of sacrifices to gods and ancestors, praying to them for successful harvests and a safe environment free from wars, disputes, illnesses and natural disasters.

People wearing masks of gods and ancestors were considered the impersonation of these unseen spiritual beings. The masks guaranteed that the gods and ancestors attended the ceremony and were ready to listen the prayers of the people.

Nowadays masks are used in many festivals, their religious flavor has been replaced (sometimes not completely) by an entertaining one, being part of a celebration aimed to strengthen the identity of the human groups, and their links to their environment and the past generations.

Masks of the Torch Festival of the Yi

The Torch Festival, which takes place on June 24th of the lunar calendar, is the most important traditional festival of the Yi people, popular in the provinces of Yunnan, Guizhou and Sichuan. It is also celebrated among other ethnic groups such as the Bai, Naxi, Jinuo and Lahu.

Scholars suggest that the origins of the Torch Festival lie in the early worship of fire, when Yi ancestors saw that it had the power to repel insects and protect crop growth. During the festival, huge torches of tied dry pine and lightwood are erected in all the villages, with smaller torches placed in front of the door of each household. The torches are lit at nightfall, making the villages as bright as at daytime. At the same time, people walk around the fields and houses, holding small torches, placing them in the corners of the fields. Back in the villages young men and women sing and dance around the big torches that burn throughout the night.

On display are festival sacrifice masks used on the Torch Festival, in some Yi villages in Yulong and Fabiao townships of Shuangbai County when people dance the Luosheng dance. During the Torch Festival, the villagers will first kill a calf to make sacrifice to the heaven and earth and the ancestors. Then two barefoot men wearing a hat, clothes and skirt made from straw will put on a mask of a male and a mask of a female. They will lead a band playing the Luosheng and dance from house to house to expel de evil spirits and bless the entire village.

These two masks evoke, with their combination of stripes and colours, the traditional Yi ceramics and the flames of fire that characterize this festival.

Masks of the Broadsword dance of the Yi people

These are festival sacrifice masks used on the Torch Festival, when the Yi people in Gaofeng, Tuolan and Heijing of Lufeng County dance the broadsword dance. There are 8 large masks and 8 small masks.

Three of each size are exhibited in the museum. The three large masks are black-faced, white-faced, and red-faced. They are said to represent the gods of earth, heaven, and mankind separately. Other beliefs say that they represent Menghuo, Zhuge Liang and Guan Yu, three popular figures of the novel *Three Kingdoms*. The large ones are placed in the festive environment to guarantee the presence of the deities. The small, human-sized deities are carried by some of the participants.

The sacrificial activities last for three days. After the consecration ceremony of the using the big masks, the three gods will open the way, followed by the broadsword team divided into three groups to perform broadsword dances. They will go from house to house to expel the evil spirits. Finally, the ceremony of sending away the torch will be held.

At the end, the masks must be burned and the ancestors are commemorated and prayed for good luck.

Masks of Worship the Dragon of the Yi people

These are festival sacrifice masks used by the Huayao (flowery belt) branch of the Yi people in Longwu and Shouchong of Shiping County.

Every year on the first day horse after the Spring Festival the Worship the Dragon ceremony is held to commemorate Along, the hero who drove away an evil spirit for the benefit of the people, and to pray for a good harvest and a peaceful household in the coming year.

Colorful painted lifelike masks pasted with paper are worn in the sacrificial activities.

On display are the serious-looking mask of Erlang with a third eye, perhaps pointing to his divine character, and the mask of the God of the Locality, with a rustic aspect, the decoration of its face evoking the landscape of the fields, and hairs emerging from the edge of its moustache like the plants of the fields. The third mask is of a leopard, also used in this celebration.

Erlang is the embodiment of a series of heroes who in the past fought against floods, deified. That is why his presence in the dragon festival is necessary, because he is also a regulator of rains and floods. The God of the Locality is the first beneficiary of the adequate rains.

Smiling monk mask of the Bai people

Popular among the Bai communities of Dali Prefecture, this mask is used on festival entertainment performances.

Every year during the Spring Festival, when the deer-and-crane dance is performed, people wear this mask together with the other masks including those of Maitreya Buddha, the God of Longevity, the big-head baby, Sun Wukong, the Pigsy, the lion, etc., to add a joyful atmosphere to the festival and to pray for annual prosperity and happiness.

Similar masks are used in the Nuo dances of the Guizhou province, where the monk always adds an air of happiness to the scene.

These characters are also related to Budai, the smiling monk who welcomes believers in many Buddhist temples, who in turn symbolizes that religious practice is a joyful activity and that the most important thing in Buddhist teachings is the generous and compassionate spirit.

The joyful character is distilled into each element of these masks. The smiling mouth, the wide cheeks, the eyes with expression of happiness, all lead to the joy of the Buddhist religion.

Masks for the Sand - Piling festival of the Dai people

Sand-piling festival is a ceremony usually performed in the third day of the Water Splashing Festival, when the Dai people will built five small pagodas piling sand, arrange flowers around them and offer sacrifices. Later they will sit around them at the gate of the local temple to listen to the religious teachings of the masters. In some places this ceremony is performed on other festivals round the year.

Later, the men in the Buddhist temple, wearing the masks and playing with swords and sticks will lead a procession, followed by men playing the elephant-foot drums and woman holding flowers. The long procession wearing masks walks along the street, dancing and performing so as to drive out the evil spirits and pray for safety.

These ferocious-looking color-painted masks, are pasted with palm tree bark, cloth and paper.

They are strange characters with deformed faces and big noses, their hair disordered, in one case on the head and in the other the whiskers that hang further below the chin.

Peacock Dance Props of the Dai people

The peacock dance performance props are used by the Dai people during the Watering-Splashing Festival, Closing Door Festival and the Opening Door Festival. Opening and closing doors refers to the time when monks are secluded behind the temples' walls.

The peacock is a symbol of happiness and good fortune and the peacock dance is therefore performed on festivals. In the past, the dance was performed by men, wearing golden masks and putting on props imitating the peacock feather.

With the accompaniment of elephant-foot drums, cymbals and other musical instruments, they mimicked peacock flying, rotating, feeding, and interacting as a symbol of happiness.

Two white pressed paper masks with red lips and a slightly coloured face are on display. Under the face, they carry a bond with several fragments of cloth, and on the head a curious headdress, reminiscent of a stupa or other sacred place, although it could be an exaggeration of the feathers on the heads of peacocks.

Masks of the Maomao dance of the Dai people

These are festival masks used by the "Huayao" (flowery belt) branch of the Dai people in Xinping County, when they perform the Maomao dance during the Spring Festival. There are 5 masks, consisting of one of a tiger head and 2 pairs of the devil couple, Bianxilong and Bianxihan.

The Maonao dance team is composed of several young men, who replay the scene of the tiger chasing after Bianxilong and Bianxihan, the devil couple, and driving them away. In the end, the masks representing the devil couple are burned, which symbolizes expelling the plague and disaster and praying for a good harvest and good luck.

In the museum are displayed:
A tiger mask with a huge mouth and three eyes made with round mirrors, with silver teeth and a golden tongue, and a cloth that extends to cover the person wearing the mask.

Two masks of devils, one male, Bianxilong, and one female, Bianxihan. Both have crooked and deformed faces (her face is pink) that are supposed to be as disgusting as the thoughts they can keep in their hearts. The male devil is extremely grotesque in its ugliness.

Section 4

Masks for Opera performance

The masks for opera performance are closely related to traditional cultures, especially to the folk beliefs of different ethnic groups. They take a myriad forms in different styles to represent ghosts, folklore figures and animals. Until today masks for the Nuo opera, Guansuo opera, Dai opera and Zhuang opera are still seen among the native ethnic minorities of Yunnan.

In China, traditional drama has had a complicated and fertile relationship with other expressive arts. Although the early history of drama in China is still not perfectly known, the antecedents of drama likely include shamanistic rituals that featured dancing, possibly with masks. The result is that nowadays performers usually wear ritually consecrated wooden masks representing a host of spirits and deities.

In some minorities' performances, the gods were originally 'borrowed' from the Han Chinese, but their function usually is different. In many places, on the third day of the third month, the young men go together to dance and sing before the sacred images, at such times several men wearing fearsome masks may meet together and perform rituals intended to rid the village of any evil influences.

Nuo opera masks of the Han people

Nuo ritual exorcisms enacted as masked dance, were performed to frighten away evil and to avoid disasters.

Face masks, rituals, dance and theatrical play were related to exorcism and dispelling evil.

A marked characteristics of the nuo dance is dancing with masks both ferocious and malevolent so as to deter the demons or ghosts. This ritual dance has a long history closely related to the totemism in primitive society.

The performances of the Duangong opera can be divided into the antique altar and the funny altar. The antique one is part of the religious rite, and the latter, which usually borrow from other local operas, including the Dian (Yunnan), opera and the Huadeng (Flower Lantern) Opera, is performed for fun.

Also known as the Duangong Opera masks, the masks exhibited in the museum are popular in the Zhaotong area, worn when the Nuo opera is performed. They are generally made of light wood such as poplar and willow, carved and colorfully painted. The y represent historic and mythical characters as the God of Longevity, the God the Earth, the God of the Kitchen, Erlang, etc.

Here we present some of these masks:

1. Xiaojimei, with a crooked face.

2. Zaoma. The Goddess of the Kitchen. Like a toothless old woman wearing a traditional hat.

3. The monkey.

4. Kuixing, the god of the literati.

Guansuo Opera masks of the Han people

These masks are worn by villagers of Xiaotun village in Chengjiang County when they perform the Guansuo opera.

Guansuo drama was originally a religious folk activity that developed in a popular drama. This is a purely Chinese type of drama, as this region is one of the first in Yunnan to have a Chinese presence.

Throughout the drama, scenes with a marked religious character are represented, such as the arrival of the god who will preside over the celebration, the expulsion of evil spirits that could cause diseases and other problems. The main purpose of the Guansuo opera is to drive away ghosts and plagues. The theme of the opera is adoration of the ancestors, especially the heroes.

Those with more civil themes are related to the adventures of Guan Yu during the time of the Three Kingdoms, as is to be expected in settlements that were originally military colonies.

These paper-pasted masks are supposed to be worn over the heads. There are 20 characters, including Liu Bei, Guan Yu, Zhang Fei, Kong Ming, Guan Suo, Bao San Niang, etc.

Now performed only during the Spring Festival. Each actor specializes in representing a character, and throughout his life he will always give life to the same, then he will transmit it to one of his children, so that in some cases there are several generations of actors embodying the same character.

Of the masks exhibited in the museum, here are the masks of:

1. Bao Sanniang.
2. Zhang Fei.
3. Guan Suo
4. Princess Baihua
5. Liu Bei
6. Guanyu.

Facial make-up of the Chuichuiqiong Opera of the Bai people.

These are models used as the reference for painting facial makeup for the traditional opera "Chuichuiqiang", which is popular among the Bai people's neighborhoods in the Dali area.

These uniquely modeled facial masks are mainly in four colors: red, yellow, blue and black. There are front portraits and side portraits. The opera is usually performed during festivals, ceremonies to greet the gods, weddings and funerals, and other occasions like setting up the columns of a new house.

The characters are divided into four categories: Sheng (the male), Dan (the female), Jing (the painted face) and Chou (the clown).

The repertory includes popular novels, as the Investiture of the Gods, the Three Kingdoms, Romance of Sui and Tang Dynasties, the Warriors of the Yang family and the Water Margin.

The enhanced visage has long been a tradition in both daily life and performance in China, and consequently, makeup designs have evolved into elaborate expressions of the characters.

Masks of the Dai Opera

The Dai opera originated from the Dai ethnic singing and dancing performances and Buddhist scripture chanting. During the later period of development, it absorbed the artistic culture of the Dian (Yunnan) opera, Peking opera, and shadow play, and gradually came into a relatively complete form of opera in its own right.

It appeared in the local ethnic minority hereditary headmen' government office during the Qing Dynasty, and gradually spread to all Dai people. The opera performance is lively, rich in color and dramatic performance.

Popular in some of the Dai neighborhoods in Dehong and Baoshan, these masks are worn by performers of the traditional plays.

Masks, made of paper, represent the king, the queen (3rd), the princess (4th), the devil (5th), servants, etc.

Masks for the Zhuang Opera

The Zhuang opera developed on the basis of Zhuang folk literature and is also influenced by folk art and opera of the Han. Popular among the Zhuang neighborhoods in Wenshan Zhuang Autonomous Prefecture, these masks are worn by performers of the traditional opera.

The Zhuang opera in Yunnan province includes two branches: the Tu opera and the Sha opera. The former is represented by the opera in Funing County. The latter by the the opera in Guangnan County, and because it is popular among the people of the Sha Branch of the Zhuang, it is called the "Sha opera".

The Mogong, priest of the local religion, may take charge of the performing troupe. During the early stage of development, the performers would wear wooden masks to present scenes of exorcising ghosts, greeting the gods, praying for good luck, driving away ill fortune, and thanking gods for a good harvest.

Two life-size paper masks (images 1 and 2) with eye openings, which had to be used for the operas, and six smaller wooden masks (images 3 and 4) without eye openings, which would play another role in the representations, are on display in the museum.

Section 5.

Masks for guarding the house

The masks to protect the house are hung on the lintels of the doors or eaves to scare away demons and protect family peace. They are extensions of the masks of witchcraft and those of the nuo opera.

They are mostly shaped as a ferocious-looking tiger's head, with a sword in its mouth, a long tongue and a sculpted incantation. It is believed that after the masks are made, an opening ceremony must be held by wizards to give them life and become a deity so that they will be able to play the role of protecting the house, exorcising the evil spirits and removal of ill fortune.

The Tunkou Mask of the Yi people are masks for guarding the home popular among the Yi communities in Chuxiong and Kunming. Most of them are painted on gourds or wooden scoops. Some are painted on wood plates, cloth, paper, and others are painted on earthenware. No matter what materials are used, they are always shaped as tiger heads, with the handles as tiger's tails.

The five-tiger Tunkou masks, which incorporate the concept of the tiger totem of the Yi people, are the most distinctive ones.

The use of a mask shaped as a pumpkin, symbol of the mother's womb, may indicate that in the past home protection was provided by the female domestic spirits.

Tunkou masks of the Shui people

These wooden-carved Tunkou masks with a sword in the mouth are popular among the Shui communities in Fuyuan County bordering Yunnan and Guizhou Provinces. They are usually made of wood and sometimes represent ferocious animals, being their aim to keep evil spirits out of the house. When hanging the mask people feel the presence of the protective spirit that with his powerful mouth will literally swallow the bad influences.

Depending on the difference in appearance and function, they can be divided into five types. People choose one of them depending on the orientation of their home and the problems that the family can face.

- Xing Xing Bi Sha can deactivate ominous threats to the house from rocks, caves and hidden paths.

- The Xiong Shen' e Sha can bring good luck to the family, with good relations between family members, bring prosperity to domestic animals and avoid disasters.

- Shuang Jian Wu Sha masks are for houses that face the mountains and suffer evil winds.

- Families who suffer bad luck, frequent setbacks and constant loss of livestock can choose the Xiong Shen Ba Sha masks.

- The infertile family yearning for a baby can hang the Songzi Tunkou, i.e. the Tunkou of fertility.

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Note: *The description and photographs of the masks in this museum were taken during the summer of 2019. Some pieces can be removed or new pieces can be added. Since the sole purpose of this book is to instruct on some interesting aspects of human culture, neither the author nor the publishers can be held responsible for the fact that these same pieces were (or not) on display in the future.*

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